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SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA ON RUSSIA, BOSNIA, KARABAKH, KAZAKHSTAN

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathy Allegrone,
Reasons 1.4(b),(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The Government of France is "reflecting" on ways to improve the strategic relationship between Russia and the West, and may consider the potential value of entering into new negotiations on the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, according to Roland Galharague, French MFA Assistant Secretary-equivalent for Continental Europe. Galharague told Political Minister Counselor October 9 that Europeans have come to acknowledge the continuing importance of conventional forces. He argued that accepting the Russian request to re-negotiate the Treaty could also be of use to the U.S. Switching to Bosnia, Galharague described as a "good idea" the USG initiative to propose a comprehensive transition package. He inquired whether the USG has developed views on the criteria for successful implementation of the proposals, or whether we have determined the minimum we will accept as constituting success, and he argued that the USG and EU must determine what steps to take if the plan fails. Moving on to the Caucasus, Galharague said it is "urgent" to reassure the Azerbaijanis that USG and EU support for Armenian-Turkish normalization in no way diminishes our support for Azerbaijani-Armenian negotiations over the future of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. When Political Minister Counselor reported that President Sarkozy's October 6 comments in Astana -- proposing that Kazakhstan play a role in resolving regional disputes -- came as a surprise to the USG, Galharague replied, "Yes, they also came as a surprise to us (in the MFA)."

12. (C) COMMENT: French officials in both the MFA and Elysee have informed us that they are open to considering a number of proposals to improve the overall strategic relationship between Russia and the West, given the many complicated issues that are inter-related (such as CFE, European security architecture, frozen conflicts, etc). To our knowledge, Galharague's comments on CFE do not yet indicate a French policy change towards Russia, but rather reflect the French desire to think creatively about how they can play an active role in addressing some thorny issues before additional unfavorable Russian actions occur. More broadly, French officials are attempting to determine the ways in which Russia can realistically serve as a partner for France, Europe and the U.S. -- and they are operating under pressure from their demanding President, who is impatient with bureaucratic processes and favors quick action. Guidance on any of the below would be welcome as we seek to make the U.S. position clear as early in the French decision-making process as possible. Additional comments from Damien Loras, advisor to President Sarkozy, on current brainstorming within the President's office, will be reported separately. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

RUSSIA

13. (C) Conveying an apparent shift in French policy, Roland Galharague told Political Minister Counselor October 9 that

the French now want to "reflect" on the possibility of accepting the Russian proposal to launch new negotiations on the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, following the Russian suspension of their participation in the CFE in 2007.

Galharague argued that the USG stands to benefit from re-negotiating the Treaty because we could show our commitment to multilateralism, and, at the same time, demonstrate our tough approach toward Russia on issues of substance. The Russians themselves have an interest in the negotiations, Galharague claimed, because they have military equipment to sell or discard. The Europeans are interested in addressing the Treaty, he reported, because recent events, such as the 2008 war in Georgia, have underscored the continuing importance of conventional forces. Everyone stands to benefit, he claimed.

¶4. (C) Galharague also recalled that historically the USG, on the one hand, and the French and the Europeans, on the other, developed different opinions as to the best approach to negotiating the CFE. U.S. officials saw it as a Treaty between two alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact), whereas the French preferred to negotiate an agreement among states. Now some states interested in the Treaty are in the EU or NATO, or both, while others are not, Galharague observed. Thus the French believe the role of conventional forces in Europe could best be addressed region by region, leaving the most controversial areas until the end (i.e. the Caucasus). Moreover, Galharague argued that the continued Russian presence in the break-away regions of Georgia should not pose an impediment to launching negotiations. In 1990, he noted, negotiations took place even while Turkey had troops in northern Cyprus and British troops had a major presence in Northern Ireland.

BOSNIA

¶5. (C) In order to make progress in Bosnia, the USG and EU must communicate clearly and coordinate closely, according to Galharague. He described as a "good idea" the USG initiative to propose a comprehensive package for Bosnia, including 5 plus 2 conditions and constitutional reform. "But we must make sure the terms are clear on all sides," he warned. He asked if the USG had developed views on the criteria for successful implementation of the proposals, or whether we have determined the minimum we will accept as constituting success. "These are not technical questions," he said. "We need political reflection about measures of success." And, crucially, he argued that the USG and EU must determine what steps to take if the plan fails. He added that the French remain unclear as to the USG view of these questions because "the American position is not very defined."

¶6. (C) Galharague also stressed that the USG and the EU must be clear on the objectives of the package, specifically transition, as soon as possible. If, for instance, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) does not close the Office of the High Representative by its November meeting, the closure will likely have to wait until 2011, due to the Bosnian elections of 2010. "We're not interested in transition for transition's sake," Galharague explained; transition will help Bosnia to stabilize and to move toward EU and NATO accession. Nor do the French seek "constitutional reform for reform's sake;" the EU will support reforms that strengthen the state and improve its effectiveness. The four European members of the Quint agree with these positions, according to Galharague, but there is not consensus throughout the EU. Nonetheless, he added, the incentives for progress are in the hands of the Europeans. Thus European states on the PIC steering board must be in agreement about the objectives and means required for progress.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

¶7. (C) "We have no illusions about Nagorno-Karabakh," Galharague said, implying the French are pessimistic about the likelihood of resolving the decades-old dispute. It is

"urgent," nonetheless, he argued, to reassure the Azerbaijanis that USG and EU support for Armenian-Turkish normalization in no way diminishes our support for Azerbaijani-Armenian negotiations over the future of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Galharague proposed that the USG and the GOF issue a joint message to the Azerbaijanis conveying our full support. In addition, he suggested that the Minsk Group issue a new, joint declaration containing three main elements: (1) we congratulate the Armenians and the Turks on their normalization process; (2) we believe the Nagorno-Karabakh process will help stabilize the region; (3) we will stay engaged.

KAZAKHSTAN

18. (C) When Political Minister Counselor reported that President Sarkozy's October 6 comments in Astana -- encouraging Kazakhstan to play a role in resolving regional conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and Ossetia, and suggesting that Kazakhstan host a summit during its OSCE chairmanship to address European security issues -- came as a surprise to the USG, Galharague replied dryly, "Yes, they also came as a surprise to us (in the MFA)."

RIVKIN